

Living Wills & Medical POA's

Important parts of a comprehensive estate plan are living wills (or advanced medical directives) and medical powers of attorney. These documents allow you to direct your medical care when you are incapacitated or no longer able to make medical decisions for yourself. Together they help ensure that you receive the care you desire.

A living will is a legal document that tells your doctor exactly what kind of treatment you do or do not want in the event you are incapacitated. It is primarily used to state in advance your wishes about the use of life-prolonging medical care if you become terminally ill and unable to communicate. However, there is no limit to the conditions your living will might cover.

Because it is impossible to anticipate every medical condition that may arise, a medical power of attorney is a good companion to a living will. A medical power of attorney names an agent (usually a family member or close friend) to make medical decisions on your behalf in the event you are incapacitated. It also gives your agent access to your medical information and authority to fully participate with your treating physicians in deciding the care to be provided to you.

Since it is such a large responsibility, you should carefully consider who you name as your agent under a medical power of attorney and make sure that they understand and will execute your wishes. Alternate agents should also be named in the event your primary agent is unable to act on your behalf.

You should also consider relating to family and friends your desires along with the contents of your living will or medical power of attorney. This will help diffuse any contention that may arise in the future when these documents are used. By proactively planning for your future you can help ensure that these matters are dealt with as you wish.

The Northern Law Center-SHAPE can discuss your wishes and prepare both living wills and medical powers of attorneys as part of our comprehensive estate planning services.

Living Wills & Medical POA's is distributed by the Northern Law Center-SHAPE, located in Building 318 on SHAPE. Our office hours are 0900 to 1700 Monday through Friday. You may call us for an appointment at DSN 423-4868/civilian (32) 65/44 48 68. Visit us on the Internet at <http://www.usagbenelux.eur.army.mil/sites/installation/legal.asp> for helpful information on other legal topics.